

Abstract
Workforce Innovation Fund – Rhode Island

Applicant Name: Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training

Applicant Category: Individual State Applicant

Lead Applicant City/State: Rhode Island

Areas Served: Rhode Island

Project Name: On-Ramps to Career Pathways

Funding Level Requested:	\$2,369,741	technical costs
	\$412,381	evaluation costs

Project Type: A

Description of Proposed Project:

Rhode Island is at a critical juncture. With the second highest unemployment rate nationally, a growing skills gap, and shrinking resources, Rhode Island must re-design its systems to more effectively and efficiently address the needs of job seekers, workers and employers, or risk losing its ability to compete economically.

On-Ramps to Career Pathways will undertake systems reform in two main areas: 1) building from existing work by the Governor's Workforce Board, On-Ramps will establish 3-4 career pathways and align and integrate a range of public funding streams and programs along those pathways; and 2) create an on-ramps system to those pathways to enable low-skilled, low-literacy, and long-term unemployed workers to successfully access those pathways and in turn, access the private-sector training and experience needed to gain greater economic stability.

The project addresses several critical problems: 1) the fragmentation of workforce services across multiple agencies and programs that are often more driven by public funding requirements than by job seeker or employer needs; 2) the lack of clear pathways for workers to access and move along; 3) a lack of effective coordinated programs and services to "on-ramp" customers to pathways and enable them to move along those pathways; and 4) limited public funds to support staffing to accomplish identified systems changes.

Reorganization of a portion of the workforce system to create effective locational and programmatic on-ramps to career pathways programs, with a particular focus on implementation at one-stop career centers, will help vulnerable populations, including low-skilled, low-literacy residents, and long-term unemployed workers, access career pathways that will help them develop skills in demand by industry. On-ramps to clear pathways with private sector training investment will enable the public workforce system to support workers in bridging the skills gap even in the face of shrinking resources. This will help participants in the workforce development system achieve better and faster employment outcomes and increase the satisfaction of employers with the public workforce system. As part of re-organization, braiding of funding

streams and policy changes to support on-ramps and pathways will result in using funding strategically to support RI residents and businesses.

Rhode Island has significant work upon which to build On-Ramps to Career Pathways, including a recently formed Career Pathways Task Force of the Governor's Workforce Board; its Unified Expenditure Report that details all workforce-related funding streams in the state and through which relationships and common understandings have been created across state agencies; a Community College Trade Adjustment Act grant focused on career pathways; and research on regulatory barriers to braiding funding streams.

Building upon this important ground work, On-Ramps goals and anticipated outcomes are:

Goal: Create systems change by braiding funding, using uniform performance measures and pursuing policy changes that will support career pathways along a low- to high-skilled continuum which aligns training, education and employment services and programs, creates transparent and easily accessible pathways and integrates supportive services.

Outcomes:

- Funding and program changes that result in more investment in a career pathways systems approach.
- Increased number of career pathways mapped and transparent to customers and employers; more partnerships established across the system.
- Improved ability of state agencies to evaluate impact of public investments; shifts in resources towards quality programs; better targeting of resources based on customer and employer need.
- Increased number of customers receiving support services leading to higher employment retention

Goal: Pilot the systems change through a re-design of a portion of the one-stop system and systematize on-ramps to those pathways (both *locational on-ramps*, including decentralized services; and *program on-ramps*, including work readiness, career coaching, and experiential work).

Outcomes:

- More low-literacy and low-skilled customers receive more intense services at the one-stops
- Increased program and job retention; increased movement along career pathways in select industries through promotions or wage gains;
- Faster throughput of customers including faster time to hiring;
- Increased cost effectiveness of services by demonstrating higher wage gains and faster through-put for those in on-ramps and career pathways for public funds invested
- Increased customer and employer satisfaction;
- Employers report increase in work ready candidates; in offering work experience to job seekers, in hiring more people from one-stops through the on-ramps and career pathways pilot; documented employer investment in providing training for new hires.

Project Approach

On-Ramps brings together key state and local agencies to implement the new on-ramp to career pathways system, including agencies responsible for WIA Title I and II, Wagner Peyser, Trade Adjustment, TANF, SNAP Employment and Training, public higher education funds, and private philanthropy.

The project's first year focuses on mapping pathways and supportive services at the state level, creating common measures across state agencies, and identifying and implementing policy and administrative changes needed to braid funding streams efficiently. A web-based tool of career pathways and the related programs and funding streams will be published on line for customers, businesses, and community organizations that offer transparent access to career pathways information. State-level work to design a work readiness credential and training curriculum that is verified by employers will be developed. At the local level in the first year, the two Workforce Investment Boards will conduct business process re-design of the one-stops to create the on-ramps programs with braided funding streams and common measures; and will identify efficient coaching and career planning tools and methods, including on-line resources.

In the second two years of the project, two of the state's four one-stop centers will pilot the on-ramp system to career pathways through a re-organized one-stop that provides critical tools and resources to effectively bridge clients onto career pathways. Key among these will be the use of a range of work experiences, including internships, apprenticeships, and on the job training, in order to build participant work readiness and technical skills and leverage private sector investment as the public investments decrease.

By year three, Rhode Island anticipates re-aligning more resources and systems based on the early results from the pilot project, expected to show that by creating a cohesive set of on-ramp tools that lead clients to career pathways, the workforce system will gain in efficiencies and outcomes.

Description of Proposed Evaluation Strategy:

We plan to use both formative and summative evaluation methods to test the On-Ramps to Career Pathways Initiative. The formative evaluation will be used to assess the systems change process and on-ramps implementation. This will be used to learn and make mid-course corrections along the way and ensure that the systems change and on-ramps are implemented effectively. A summative evaluation will be used to measure the success of the project in terms of the outputs and outcomes desired for both of the two main project goals. We will use a quasi-experimental strategy that will compare a demonstration group (experimental group) to a comparison group across time to answer the following core questions: a) Do on-ramps to career pathways create better employment and retention outcomes than general on-ramps? b) Does organizing the system around career pathways produce better outcomes? c) Is using on-ramp services overall more effective than no on-ramp services. We also plan to measure the intensity of services (how many services, how long) as part of the evaluation to make causal connections about which interventions are the most effective.

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